

Course: Philosophy 317: Philosophy of Religion

Instructor: Mark Zelcer

Office Hours: 12:30 - 1:20 and by appointment.

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Meetings: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 10:20-11:15. Consult the College website for non-class days or rescheduled classes.

Texts: There are two texts for this course. The first is the course packet which will be available in the copy center, the second is David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, available in the Baruch College Bookstore.

Requirements: You must do all the readings for the course and be prepared to discuss them in class. Your inability to intelligently discuss the material will adversely affect your grade. Your class participation is part of your grade. There will be 3 short papers due throughout the semester. They will each have a deadline. I will not accept late papers. The standard university rules apply to attendance. Your grade will be a function of the above factors.

There are very explicit remarks about academic honesty on the Baruch College website. It is expected that you will adhere to them. This is non-negotiable, and there is a zero tolerance policy toward those who perpetrate acts of academic dishonesty. I have neither the time nor the patience to deal with plagiarized work or those who submit them.

Intellectual integrity on the part of all students is basic to individual growth and development through college coursework. When academic dishonesty occurs, the teaching/learning climate is seriously undermined and student growth and development are impeded. For these reasons, any form of intellectual dishonesty is a serious concern and is therefore prohibited. For more information see: www.oswego.edu/integrity. Should you commit any form of academic dishonesty, you may fail the course.

Notes: Do not use your cell phones in class. I realize that lectures and class discussion often generate insights which you feel must be shared with your friends and family. If you happen to discover that one of the authors we are reading said something particularly interesting, please wait until after class to announce it on YikYak or text your significant other.

If you need to leave class early, please sit near the door so as to be minimally disruptive when you exit.

The Office of Disability Services is available to assist students who have a legally documented disability or students who suspect that they may have a disability. If you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to successfully complete this course, please contact the Office of Disability Services. (Alternative testing for students with learning disabilities is available through Disability Services.)

Prerequisites: There are no other prerequisites for this course outside those established by the department of philosophy. This course will be fairly self-contained, and can be taken by anyone capable of carefully reading the material.

Course Description: This course will survey a number of the important questions in the philosophy of religion including the existence of God, free will, the meaning of life, the ethics of belief, theories of the origin of religion, and atheism.

Class schedule: The classes will most likely be broken down as follows (all the readings except for those by David Hume are in the course packet):

Week 1: Preliminaries. What is philosophy? What is the philosophy of religion? Quick background to Western Religions.

Week 2: Some theories on the origin of religion: excerpts from Critias' "Sisyphus," Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*; Pascal Boyer's "Why is religion Natural?"

Week 3: Faith and its ethics. Introduction to faith, belief, dogma and doubt. Read Clifford's "Ethics of Belief" and William James' "The Will to believe,"

Week 4: Pascal's Wager, Read the Pascal excerpt and, for fun, H. L. Mencken's "Memorial Service".

Week 5: The Meaning of life. Read Tolstoy's *Confession*.

Week 6: What is a proof? Inductive and deductive proofs. Read the essay on proofs in the course packet.

Week 7: The ontological argument. Read Anselm's *Proslogion*, Gaunilo's discussion. Kant's discussion and Hume's chapter 1 in the assigned text.

Week 8: The moral argument for the existence of God. Read the Kant excerpt and

Axelrod and Hamilton's "The evolution of cooperation" in the course packet.

Week 9: Teleological argument for God's existence. Read William Paley's "The watch and the watchmaker." Read Hume's Chapters 2 and 5 in the assigned text.

Week 10: Cosmological argument for God's existence. Read Hume's chapter 9.

Week 11: Paradoxes. Proofs against God's existence: Omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence. The Problem of Evil. Read Hume's Chapter 10. Miracles. Read Hume's essay "On Miracles".

Week 12: Theology and Falsification. Read the pieces by Basil Mitchell and Anthony Flew in the course packet.

Read the excerpt of Rudolf Otto's "The experience of the Holy."

Week 13: Free Will. Read the article by Steven Cahn in the course packet.

Week 14: Wittgenstein's language game approach to God's existence. Read the excerpt in the course packet.